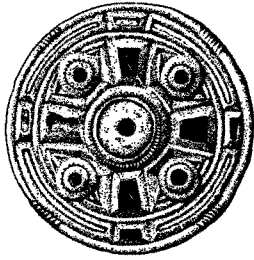


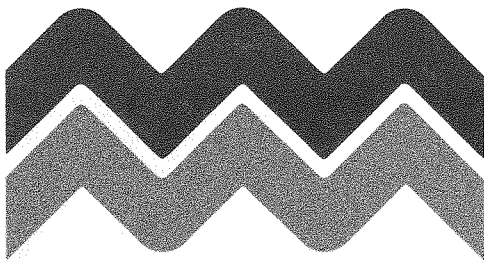
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Cambridgeshire, 1993

**Simon Bray and Stephanie Leith**

On Behalf of  
**Countryside Planning & Management  
for Spicers**  
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Cambridgeshire  
County Council

# An Archaeological Evaluation at Sawston, Cambridgeshire

S. Bray and S. Leith  
1993

## INTRODUCTION

The first phase of an archaeological evaluation was conducted on 12 hectares of arable in the parish of Sawston at TL 4717/4948 (Figure 1) in December 1992 on the site of an Iron Age hillfort. The work was completed by Cambridgeshire Archaeology on behalf of Countryside Planning and Management representing the client Spicers. The work was required as part of a pre-planning evaluation, with the client proposing expansion of current buildings. The land affected by the development is of significant archaeological importance being the site of an Iron Age hillfort.

One field (Figure 2) is affected by the development and the evaluation required a detailed fieldwalking programme over the threatened area.

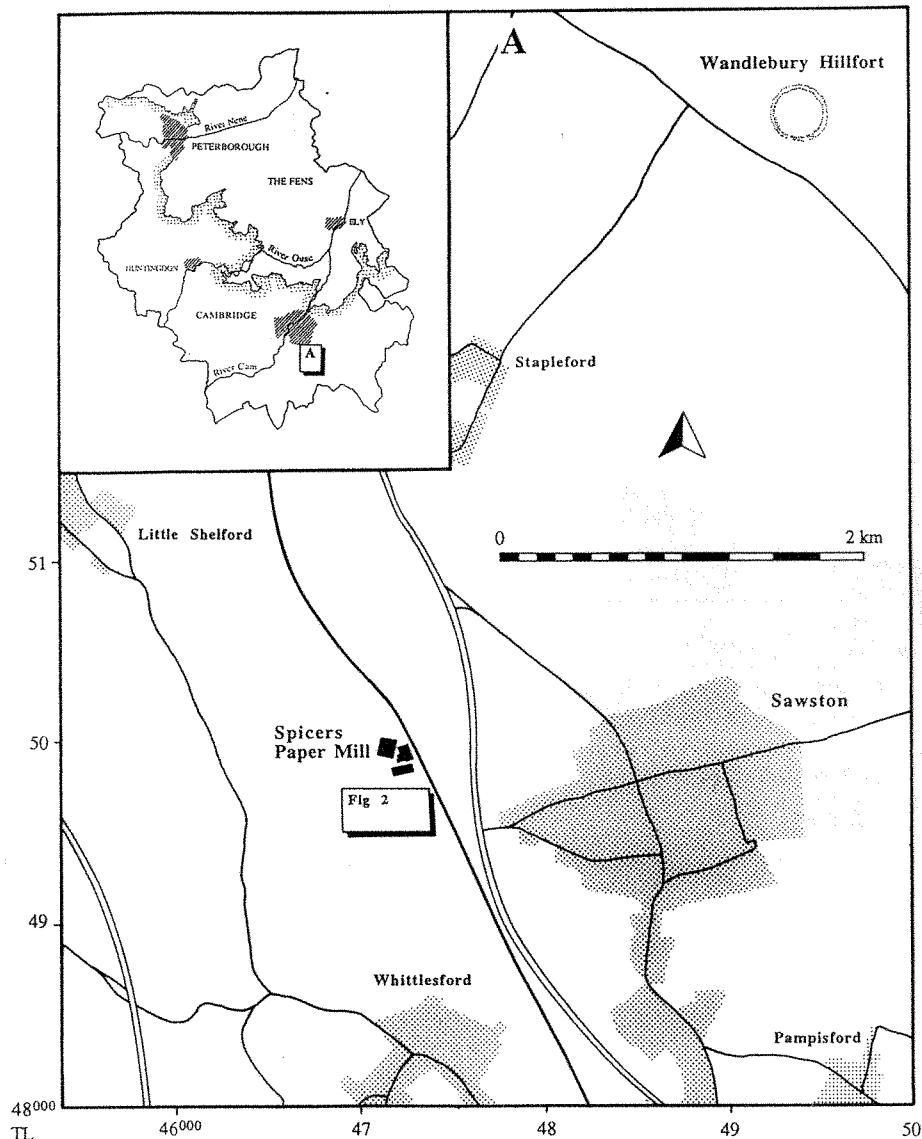


Figure 1 - Location Map

## BACKGROUND

The hillfort at Sawston is a large bivallate enclosure situated on a low chalk hill, surrounded on three sides by the floodplain of the River Cam, with the river itself close to the southern edge of the fort. The hillfort is roughly oval in plan, measuring 430 m east-west by 300 m north-south. The southern part of the fort has been destroyed, but about two thirds of the ramparts survive as slight earthworks visible on aerial photographs. There are two ditches separated by a bank, and possibly a third inner bank at the north-east. The ditches have been infilled, but appear as slight depressions containing darker soil. The ramparts appear to terminate on the north side at what is thought to be a simple entrance.

Iron Age hillforts are rare in East Anglia, the Sawston fort being one of only seven known hillforts in Cambridgeshire. Its sub-circular shape is typical for this area. Its location on a low hill by a river, although unlike the great hill-top fortifications of the south and west of Britain, is not unusual for Cambridgeshire, Essex, or Norfolk.

Iron Age hillforts are generally regarded as centres of permanent occupation, defended in response to increasing warfare. The Sawston hillfort is one of a series of forts which follow the Lea-Stort-Cam rivers system. This group of forts, which includes Wandlebury Camp and War Ditches in Cambridgeshire, forms a line from the Thames to the Fen Edge, which divides East Anglia from the rest of the country. It has been suggested that these fortifications are the result of conflict between the Trinovantes and the Catuvellauni, whose territories might have met in this zone in the first century BC.

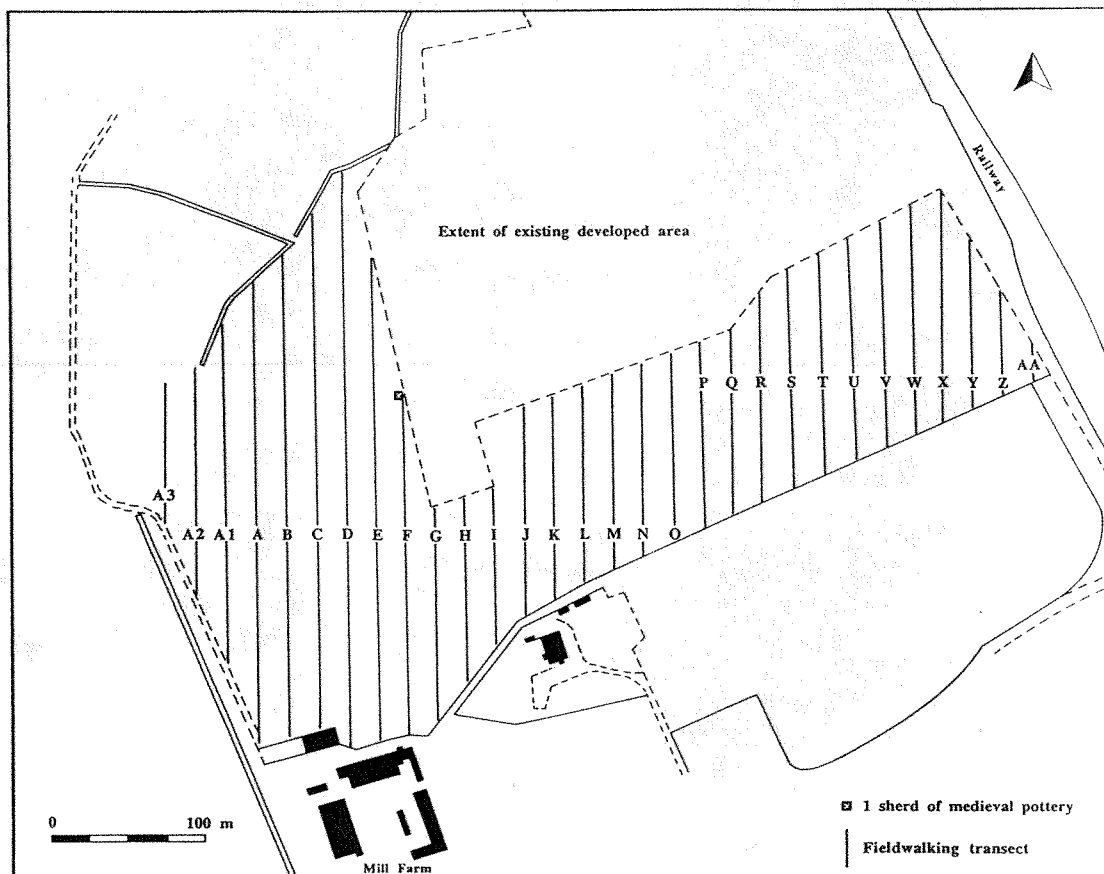


Figure 2 - Plan of Fieldwalking Transects

## RESULTS

The field in the area of proposed development had been freshly ploughed and harrowed. A 20 metre grid was established on the national grid over the field (Figure 2) and the area walked by a team of three archaeologists. During the course of the survey a series of low banks were noted surviving in the field, closely corresponding to features viewed from the air and interpreted as the banks and ditches of the hillfort.

An even spread of post-medieval debris was noted across the whole field. Apart from a single sherd of abraded medieval pottery recovered by the edge of the existing developed area (Figure 2), no finds of antiquity were found.

## CONCLUSIONS

The fact that no finds of prehistoric date were recovered during the fieldwalking exercise does not necessarily indicate a lack of archaeological deposits within the area of the hillfort. Fieldwalking is one of a number of archaeological survey and evaluation techniques that are usually used to produce complementary data, rather than as individual indices of archaeological survival. It would therefore be appropriate to consider these results alongside evidence from aerial photographs, geophysical survey, etc., before any conclusions are drawn.

This survey has indicated that no artefact-rich archaeological deposits have been damaged by cultivation in recent years (no 'finds' in the topsoil). On the basis that aerial photograph evidence and field observation do indicate the presence of an earthwork enclosure, archaeological remains must still be expected below cultivation depth.